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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 16, 2011

Bridging the Digital Divide for Miami Beach Children, Elderly

-- Students & Seniors Get Hooked Up --

Miami Beach, FL – They have become a necessity for students, and a link for seniors to their families. While many people can be seen using laptop computers anywhere from coffee houses to park benches, there are those in the community for which there is no easy access to a computer -- let alone a laptop.

As part of Miami Beach's partnership with IBM for citywide WiFi, city officials negotiated 100 laptops for the community, 70 more than originally offered. Staff looked at several options on how to deploy the computers to expand computer literacy and use among youth and seniors. Through this donation, Miami Beach established a laptop loaner program in public schools and created computer stations for the community's elder residents residing in senior affordable housing buildings.

"Free WiFi is great, but only if you have a computer to access it," explains the City's Chief Financial Officer Patricia Walker, who negotiated the IBM contract.

Through this City-sponsored program youth without access to computers or the internet at home will now be able to harness the information and resources of the internet to enrich their academic endeavors by checking out a computer at school for home use The student laptop loaner program provides 10 laptops for each of the public schools serving Miami Beach youth.

- Biscayne Elementary
- Fienberg Fisher K 8 Center
- North Beach Elementary
- South Pointe Elementary
- Treasure Island Elementary
- Nautilus Middle
- Miami Beach Senior High

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Each school is responsible for managing the program and tracking student use. Total Bank agreed to serve as a program sponsor by providing computer bags for the 70 computers being used by the schools.

Enriching connections is the goal behind the laptop stations at almost a dozen senior housing buildings. This new program is due to the success of a previous laptop program at Freedom Towers, in cooperation with Dwight's Computer for Kids. Additional buildings that primarily house seniors will now receive the IBM donated laptops. Seniors will be able to pay bills, shop, and communicate with family and friends, while accessing the city's free Wi-Fi services.

The following buildings are enrolled in the program:

- Blackstone 800 Washington Avenue
- Federation Towers 757 West Avenue
- Rebecca Towers 200 Alton Road
- Council Towers South 533 Collins Avenue
- Council Towers North 1040 Collins Avenue
- Four Freedoms House 3800 Collins Avenue
- Edwards Apartments 953 Collins Avenue
- Shep Davis Plaza 220 23r Street
- Stella Maxis 8638 Harding Avenue
- Jefferson Apartments 542 Jefferson Avenue
- Allen Apartments 2001 Washington Avenue
- Coral Rock House 1701 Normandy Drive

Each building is receiving at least two computers and free computer instruction for its residents through either Unidad of Miami Beach Senior Community Service Employment Program or Miami Beach Adult Education. Unidad's efforts is utilizing seniors employed part-time through its employment program to guide their peers on navigating the Internet and using basic computer software. Unidad is also preparing the computers for deployment.

Mouse pads were donated by Humana and mouse devices were donated by Mount Sinai Medical Center. Local schools and youth organizations are also pitching in to provide volunteer instruction for the seniors.

For more information, contact Marcela Rubio at 305.673.7491 or marcelarubio@miamibeachfl.gov.

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